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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [GB](#) [TP](#)  
SUBJECT: GABON AND SAO TOME MISCELLANY APRIL 2006

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER GLENN FEDZER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D)

11. (U) Mamboundou's Stay in South African Embassy Ended

UPG (Union of Gabonese People) President and opposition leader Pierre Mamboundou, in the South African Embassy since March 21, left his refuge the morning of April 19. A South African diplomat reported that the South African Ambassador accompanied him as far as the Presidency, where Mamboundou met with President Bongo.

12. (C) Mamboundou demands concessions from President Bongo

Sources from both sides indicate that the April 19 meeting between President Bongo and opposition leaders Pierre Mamboundou was a heated and difficult exchange, despite the positive spin put on the meeting by the Government controlled press. Mamboundou reportedly made five demands from President Bongo:  
--Assure Mamboundou's personal security;  
--Give the UPG freedom of action;  
--Compel the government to respect the law;  
--Give opposition members access to the media; and  
--Give legal stature to opposition parties and politicians.  
For his part, the President complained that Mamboundou insulted him personally, and instigated violence during the Gabonese election.

13. (C) Pierre Mamboundou May Get Official Post

Opposition leader Pierre Mamboundou may get an official post as "Opposition Leader," including a budget and staff, according to Vice Prime Minister Louis Gaston Mayila. Mamboundou is currently staying in a suite in the Meridian Hotel (Mayila is reportedly on the hotel's board of directors), and has given several press conferences since his meeting with Bongo, elaborating his concerns on the current state of Gabonese politics. Mayila privately says that Mamboundou should have some form of official recognition and protection. He claims to have personally given Mamboundou money while he was in hiding in the South African Embassy.

14. (U) Opposition Party Recognized

Zacharie Myboto's political party, the Gabonese Union for Democracy and Development, was officially recognized by the Government. Myboto, a former minister and Secretary General of President Bongo's Democratic Gabonese Party (PDG), broke with the President in April 2005, and finished third in the

Presidential election in November 2005, when he ran as an independent. Myboto and his party commemorated the party's new status with rallies over the April 29th weekend.

15. (C) Senate President Competition Rumors Focus on Two Candidates

The two names most frequently mentioned as replacements for recently deceased Gabonese Senate President Georges Rawiri are Senate First Secretary Claude Damas Ozimo and Senator Rene Radembinot Coniquet, both ethnic Myene, like Rawiri. Most of the money appears to be on Damas Ozimo. A former Libreville mayor, Ozimo is prominent in the Masonic lodge Rawiri used to lead, and comes from an important political family (his father wrote the Gabonese National Anthem). Little is known about Radembinot Coniquet. Both have maintained a low public profile. The Senate position is important; upon the death of the President, the Senate President becomes the acting head of state. That may also change; along with the rumors of Rawiri's replacement is another that the President will amend the constitution, moving the line of succession over to the head of the National Assembly.

16. (C) Equatorial Guinean Asylum Applications Impeded

Phillipe Kombila, the permanent Secretary of the Gabonese Mission for Refugees, told the Embassy that he had been instructed by senior Gabonese Government officials to move slowly when processing asylum and refugee applications from Equato-Guineans. Kombila explained that the Government did not want to antagonize Equatorial Guinean President Obiang, particularly in light of the coup attempt that had been allegedly launched from Gabonese territory in May 2004.

17. (C) Gabonese Pilot Claims Plan was to Shoot Down Deby's Plane

A contact reports that the Gabonese pilot that flew Chadian President Deby back to N'Djamena suspected that elements planed to shoot the plane down just before arrival aspart of a coup attempt March 14. The pilot, Cyraque Mbadinga, told the contact that he was questioned during his approach to N'djamena by the control tower, demanding to know who was on the flight. The contact reports Mbadinga, sensing from the tone of the questions that something was wrong, immediately broke radio contact and made a quick landing. Mbadinga said French and Chadian troops were on the runway waiting for Deby to arrive, and quickly spirited him off the airplane and out of the airport.

18. (C) Herve Patrick Opiangah Released From Prison

The President of the Union for Democracy and Social Integration (UDIS) was released from prison in March, ostensibly for reasons of poor health. Opiangah organized a protest in November 2004 demanding official recognition for his political party; several hundred of his supporters, some visibly armed with sharpened sticks, blocked a major road and faced down riot police for nearly three hours near the Presidential Palace until security forces broke up the group, unleashing tear gas and arresting demonstrators, including Opiangah. Opiangah was arrested and jailed on weapons charges; he admitted having a pistol in his possession during the protest, but maintained it was a gift from Ali Bongo that he carried with him at all times for personal security. Other weapons were allegedly found at his home and business, although to no one's surprise, as he ran a security company. Opiangah's original sentence was set to expire in March 2007; his family has actively solicited his release on humanitarian grounds. He appeared in good health during a meeting with the Embassy April 4, but complained that the Gabonese penal system is past the breaking point, with prisoners dying regularly of disease, mistreatment, and malnutrition. He claims he was held in a small room with 40 other men for over six months; in that time the prisoners were not afforded any change of clothing or adequate water for personal hygiene; drinking

water and food were also extremely limited.

19. (C) Opposition Supporter Reports on 1 December Arrests

UPG supporter Christian Nkombengnondo described to Poloff the aftermath of the police roundup following an opposition press conference 1 December 2005 (see 05 Libreville cable 0994). Nkombengnondo reported that he was handcuffed and beaten, and then held for three days with other detainees without food. On the fourth day he was fed and taken to court, where, unlike most, he was released. He credits his good fortune to the influence of his mother (an influential supporter of the ruling PDG), but he reports that 18 others, including three 15 year-olds, are still being held in the central prison. Nkombengnondo said the magistrate who handled his case was punished for releasing him. She had been instructed to send anyone who even said "UPG" during pretrial interrogations straight to prison, and she was transferred to a remote province because of her leniency with Nkombengnondo. Nkombengnondo claims he fears for his life, citing the case of Alain Renamy Bisson, another 1 December detainee and UPG supporter,

seen standing next to him in a published photo. Bisson was also released shortly after his arrest, but died recently. Nkombengnondo hinted that his death was "mysterious" and linked to his outspoken support of the opposition in Bongo's home province, but a high level UPG activist indicated that the death of the 42-year old Bisson was likely due to natural causes. Comment: Nkombengnondo's account is reminiscent of that of his leader, Mamboundou, who also claims that he fears for his life. We find both difficult to credit.

10. (C) Ambassador Meets Gabonese Human Rights Minister

The Ambassador met with Minister Pierre Claver Maganga Moussavou, who is responsible for human rights, and the fight against corruption. Moussavou is the President of the Social Democrat Party. He signed the 1994 Paris Accords as an opposition member, but has since taken his party into the "Presidential Majority." Moussavou solicited USG help for both his portfolios; he honestly discussed current prison conditions, and asked for computers that could help authorities better manage pre-trial and post-sentencing populations. Unlike his predecessor, Paul Mba Abessole (currently a Vice Prime Minister and Transport Minister), Moussavou seemed serious about his work. He discussed concrete ways of making some headway in his portfolios, and noted it was due to his actions that Opiangah (see above) was released on medical grounds.

11. (U) Taxi Union Threatens to Double Fare But-Not Just Yet

Taxi Driver's Union President Jean-Robert Menie said his members will double their rates, from 100 CFA to 200 CFA for short rides in response to higher fuel prices. This could have a ripple effect on the economy, if civil servants, who already receive a 17,000 CFA monthly allowance for transport, and others demand more money to cover the increase. Menie initially threatened the fare increase for April 3, but was personally asked by the Gabonese Prime Minister to delay the action for one week to give the government time to find a solution. As of May 4 Menie has yet to implement the fare increase.

12. (U) Child Trafficking Study Release

An extensive study on child trafficking, partially sponsored by the Minister of the Family and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was released April 26. The study, written by Denise Landria Ndembi, analyzed cases in Gabon, Benin, and Togo, and suggested ways of promoting regional and international cooperation to combat trafficking. The study also made suggestions to redefine national strategies to improve education, economic development, and anti-poverty measures.

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